1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



girl nine years old and her brother of seven were at the door of their house. The girl, amusing herself by killing minnows on the bank with a machete, cut herself lightly on the leg and started to wail. The boy, seeing the alarmed father approaching on the run, thought it best not to trust to the paternal judgment and, finding his escape blocked, threw himself into the water and fled by swimming, although he was entirely innocent. The father, seeing his blood-stained daughter and the fleeing boy, concluded without further reflection that the latter had wounded his sister. The boy was already out of reach, so the father seized a paddle weighing at least three kilograms and without hesitation hurled it after the fugitive. The missile struck the child's head, by the merest chance not killing him but opening up a wide gash in his scalp. The father, still infuriated, ignored the possible consequences, left the injured boy in the igapó, and returned to the house with the girl. Only at dusk the mother heard the boy's sobs in the jungle and went out to fetch him home.

An Indian of the Igarapé de São Jeronymo, Cazemiro nuu°k], flew into a temper at his wife one day, unjustly suspecting that she had been unfaithful. Terrified at her husband's rage, the woman fled into the jungle and could not bring herself to return, no matter how often and persistently he called her. Then Cazemiro in his fury set fire to the house and with his machete leveled all the fruit trees that he himself had planted about it. A little later he made his peace with the woman, but because their place had been destroyed, he and the woman were obliged to move in with her parents until he had shamefacedly rebuilt it. I know of still another instance of an Indian's destroying all his personal belongings with his own hands.

More tragic than these imbecilities are the suicides committed in rage. In 1941 a woman, some thirty years old, who lived with her parents at Barreiras de Belém went to the riverbank in a mood of drunken melancholy. There she drank a little rum and bought another bottle, which she took to her mother. The latter replied that the daughter could keep the rum; she wanted none of it. With no further word the daughter proceeded to the neighboring garden clearing (*roça*), dissolved fish drug (timbó) in a gourd of water, and drank it. Someone heard her faint cry, but since no one suspected what she was doing, no importance was attached to it, and it was not until later that the body of the suicide was found.

A week afterward, this same woman's nephew, called Beni, about twenty years old, also committed suicide in the same spot by drinking timbó. Before daybreak he had gone out to fish, returning about nine o'clock with a surubím, which he handed to his wife, a very young girl whom he had married just a short time before. Seeing that the little wife was not overeager to prepare the fish, he grew angry and finally struck her. His stepfather intervened, saying: "Well, and was it to have a woman to beat that you married?" This was enough to send Beni silently out of the house and into hiding, where he took the drug.

About the same time, another suicide occurred in Igarapé de Belém. A boy of sixteen returned with his relatives from a labor festival. He was not drunk, but when the canoe touched the bank, they noticed that he leaped ashore angry, for no perceptible reason. He ran up the slope above, entered the house, where he immediately mounted the platform (giráu), and flung himself under the mosquito

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



an arrow in the form of a hornet. She was revived by dyəi', who killed ma/ĕi'.[835] The spirit of ma/ĕi' is in heaven today, where, as soon as the souls of the incestuous[773] arrive, it assaults them. It is then that one hears the muted humming of the hornets of ma/ĕi'.[a]

Incest is considered, in the first place, to be a sin against the goddess ta-ë', who, according to one version of the legend (p. 114) gave to the first men knowledge of their clans by means of jacuruxy broth, which she sent them from heaven. To a man guilty of incest she said: "Thou art corrupting the people!" and punished him in life with madness, giving him the soul of an animal. After death, when his soul succeeded in passing unharmed through the poles of the gate to/ri'ta and arrived at the house of ta-ë', she loosed upon him two monsters (čərë'ruma), which tore him to pieces.[b]

An incestuous act committed casually but not repeated is strongly censured and[835] ridiculed, the guilty one being labeled an "e'pi," although this offense does not[684] expose him permanently to collective scorn to the point of exclusion from social activities. After his death, ta-ë' will send the two čərë'ruma to lick his soul from[775] head to toe, thus cleansing it of the sin it bears so that it may be received like any other soul.

Prolonged and public incest causes horror and repugnance, constituting a disgrace and intolerable shame for the relatives and, like similarly prohibited unions, may result in blood tragedies. A man named čiëë formed an incestuous alliance with the daughter of his paternal uncle and had several children by her. One day, when he had appeared at a celebration of one dya'iva, his nephew, the latter accused him to his face of the sin. In a fury čiëë threatened his nephew with a machete, but dya'iva killed him with one shot. His partner in incest fled with her offspring and was never seen again.

During my stay among the Tukuna of Igarapé Tacana in June, 1941, the following incident occurred. An Indian named Abilio murdered a woman and her suckling babe, "naturally" because of jealousy, said the Neobrazilians. The real reason, however, was this: Abilio's father-in-law, Joaquim tauaru' of the a'i clan, some fifty years old and several times a grandfather, began to maintain sexual relations with a daughter of his deceased brother. His wife and her son Moáca did everything to dissolve this union, but Joaquim tauaru' paid no attention to anyone, turning furious if anyone discussed the situation. As is the custom among Indians, the affair took a long time to reach the boiling point, which happened only after the girl had a child. It was then that Moáca and his mother, who had left the house in disgust and had fallen gravely ill, decided to put an end to this shameful state of affairs. As the offender's son, Moáca was loth to take action personally and so persuaded his brother-in-law, Abilio, of the same clan as Joaquim tauaru''s wife, to kill the girl and her infant. Abilio lured her to a secluded spot in the igapó, stunned her and the child with blows of his paddle and finished them off with his machete, tied the two bodies together, and threw them into the river. The bodies[835] were discovered a little farther down, near the riverbank; the Indians immediately[694] understood what had occurred, but their Neobrazilian boss in Belém also received[648]

[a] See the legends, "The Dishonor of mova'ča," and "dyəi' and e'pi Kill the Demon ma/ĕi'," pp. 124–125.

[b] See the legends relating to ta-ë', pp. 114–115.

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



835 word of the crime and sent someone to investigate. Learning this, Abilio voluntarily
●684 went to Belém to declare that he was the killer. His explanation that "they lived
648 like dogs" was no reason at all to the Neobrazilians, who did not understand ·
so he returned home. A few days later the subprefect of police ordered his arrest.
but after several days he was released, to the great satisfaction of the Indians of
Tacana, who were said to have been determined to free him by force. As a matter
[732] of fact, after all this, Joaquim tauaru' did appear to me to be mentally unbalanced
when I encountered him. The Indians said that he had already acquired the nature
of a dog: one girl, who watched him from a hiding place, observed that he dug
the earth with his fingernails like a dog!

## Law

685 *Crimes.*—I have never heard of theft occurring among the compound families
characteristic of Tukuna local groupings, but it does happen away from their con
fines, even among fellow tribesmen. The person robbed, eventually aided by his
relatives, deals personally with the thief. Willful thieves cannot hope for very
gentle treatment on the part of the victims. A certain nai'a'kj of Igarapé de Belem
broke into a trunk during the owner's absence, stealing the contents, but was sur
prised and forced to return everything. Some time later he repeated the misdeed
in another house, but not so cleverly as to avoid suspicion of robbery. Since nai'a'kj
obstinately refused to return his loot, the victim promptly shot him; but the wound
was not fatal.

The great majority of crimes involving death or injury take place during the
574 work parties and celebrations, being due to drunkenness. As I have already indi
674 cated, they are almost always without a serious motive, simply because alcohol
in certain Tukuna, arouses not the sexual instinct but the desire to quarrel, which
is directed most of the time against their own relatives. A fight at Igarapé da Rosa
that ended with the death of one person and the wounding of two began with in
sults which an Indian for no apparent reason hurled at his father. Strangely numer
ous are the quarrels among drunken brothers-in-law. Could this be some pro
subconscious hostile feeling against the intrusion of another clan into the family?
Moreover, in the language of the Guaraní, who have no such clan organization as
the Tukuna, the word for brother-in-law, *tovayá* (*ra*), means also "competitor"
and the verb *ahovayá* means "to be against."

In any case, as I have already explained, the Tukuna appear to consider drunk
672 enness an extenuating circumstance, which absolves the criminal almost completely
273 of responsibility. This point of view appears in the lack of concern about such
incidents: "He was soused!" they say, and that is the end of it. Even a murdered
man's own relatives, at first naturally enraged, gradually accept this point of view
which they would never do if the crime were committed in cold blood.* However
a certain aversion to the slayer always remains, and if he is so imprudent as to
glory in the deed, the relatives of the victim may still have a sudden and violent
reaction and seek revenge. It is, however, true that a killing by a drunken man
will not per se provoke reprisal.

* See pp. 106 ff. for the story of the execution of an evil shaman.

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



### Marriage and Family Life

582 According to my Tukuna informants, theoretically a girl may marry as soon after the puberty ceremony as she wishes. However, in practice I have never heard of a girl marrying until the hair had grown anew and had been clipped again, while many remain spinsters for some years afterward, if not for their entire [896] lives. Even today sexual intercourse before the puberty ceremony is unimaginable and, according to some, this held formerly for premarital intercourse as well.

836 I have reason to suppose that nowadays the jungle and the silent waters of the igapó, over which the small fishing canoes rapidly glide without leaving any betraying evidence, conceal the secrets of many lovers, whose parents suspect nothing. The Tukuna, however, because of the few barriers to marriage apart from incest rules, vigorously resent any deceit on this score, which may result in very serious conflicts. Parents consider secret relations between a man and their daughter a grave offense; they demand an explanation from the imprudent man [584] who did not respect "their home" and advise him that he had better marry the girl. If he refuses, which almost never happens, his only recourse is flight.

684 Some thirty years ago a certain Marcolino čaitaʼ married the elder of two daughters of one daura'ñkį. After some time he became enamored of his sister-in-law. If he had asked permission to marry her, daura'ñkį probably would have given it, but čaitaʼ abandoned his wife and fled with her sister. Accompanied by his brother, daura'ñkį furiously pursued the pair and overtook them; he slapped them both, bound the girl and threw her into his canoe, and let čaitaʼ go scot free on the beach. As soon as the son-in-law found himself free, he jumped on daura'ñkį, who killed him with a club during the struggle.

[177] Rape never occurs among the Tukuna, who know of this crime only from the Neobrazilians. When I attempted to get some concrete information on this, those 684 whom I approached merely answered: "If she will not—who may take her?" Cer- 648 tain *civilizados* who assumed that such a crime could be committed with impunity against an Indian woman have come off very badly with the Tukuna. A trader called Joaquim Balieiro arrived in his craft, manned by two civilized paddlers, at the place of an Indian on Lake Cajary, where he found at home only a young boy named Izidoro čëča'kakį and his virgin sister. The trader requested permission to pass the night in the house, which was granted. Later on, the three Neobrazilians conceived the plan of getting the boy drunk so as to be able to take advantage of the girl. They gave him plenty of *cachaça*, but let the cat out of the bag prematurely, before he had become sufficiently drunk. Thus čëča'kakį understood what was afoot and attacked the three with fury, shooting and killing the trader, while the paddlers barely succeeded in escaping. One of them, whom I knew personally, was gravely wounded. Back among their own kind, they said that čëča'kakį had assaulted them with intent of robbery.

Again, in a certain igarapé there dwelt an Indian who had two young daughters: farther upstream lived two rubber gatherers. Going down to their tent on the bank of the Solimões one day, these two found the Indian there. Seeing that he was lingering, the two hurried back, entered his house, deflowered the two girls, and then left in their canoe for their camp. Shortly after, the Indian returned

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



and, learning what had happened, called some relatives, scouted out the two rubber gatherers by land, fired at them from the beach, and killed them both.

*Courtship and marriage.*—A type of marriage preferred by the Tukuna is illustrated in figure 12: A marries the sister of B, while B marries A's sister. Generally, the suitor asks for the girl through her paternal uncle, who also exercises decisive authority in this matter. The initiative never stems directly or indirectly from the girl. In ancient times the parents and uncles arranged the marriage when bride and groom were still children, sometimes only five years old, I was told. After puberty the young people were obliged to carry out the agreement made by the parents and were requested to "get used to each other." Personally, I have never come in contact with an arrangement of this sort.

Some youths who realize their moral or economic unfitness for marriage, or who are afraid of the girl's parents, delay excessively the declaration to her paternal uncle while continuing to boast before their comrades: "She is mine!" Thus they come to excite ridicule and are finally forced by their companions' derision to desist or finally to declare themselves. Perhaps the only intermediary the swain can procure is the girl's father; he, however, always sends the suitor to the girl's uncle, who has the right of veto, since the parents habitually avoid opposition in order not to provide a motive for future discord between the families. It is only afterward that the girl's mother has an understanding with her future son-in-law, seriously advising him to treat her daughter well; otherwise, she will take her back. Meanwhile the request and subsequent declarations are so handled that persons not concerned are never aware of them; any attempt by an outsider to interfere would be considered an affront. If the girl peremptorily refuses to accept the suitor, not even her uncle, notwithstanding that he has given his consent, can force the issue. A curious reason for refusal was given by dɔ'tanʃna when one bere' proposed marriage. She rejected him because he was "too hard a worker." bere' is known as one of the most diligent Indians in the region—a planter of large clearings, an assiduous fisherman, and an able canoewright. dɔ'tanʃna, known as a sluggard, has nothing and does not know how to make anything, lives at her brothers' expense, and with good reason was afraid that, if bere' were her husband, his activities would mean too much work for her.

Apparently, some suitors muster the necessary courage to declare themselves only after imbibing a good quantity of paiauarú at some feast attended by the girl's family. Even so, the business is broached without the other guests' being aware of it, since the youth never publicly announces his request but asks the girl's uncle privately, in some corner where no attention will be attracted. At the close of the party the numerous guests suddenly learn, though with no great surprise, that So-and-so and What's-her-name are already married (*que fulano e sicrana já estão casados*). It is not the custom to give presents either to the bride or to her parents, nor do the latter demand chores from the bridegroom before the wedding.

*Polygamy.*—It is legitimate for a man to marry more than one woman at the same time, but polygamy is rare. I heard of only one Indian who had three wives, viz., the late Domingos ču'nekʃ, who died between 1910 and 1920, last chief at Igarapé de São Jeronymo and a famous shaman. He married three sisters whom

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



Such are the legends. The idea of heaven as an upper world similar to the earth and with inhabitants like those of the world below is encountered in the legends of the culture-hero brothers relating to the theft of fire (see p. 130) and the origin of languages. These tell how in the old days there was free passage between the two worlds, how this was interrupted, and how thereafter an attempt was made to reëstablish it. All these motives are so common in American mythology that they do not merit further comment.

*ta-ë′ and the souls.*—Quite different, however, is the concept of the most important personage of the upper world, ta-ë′. I do not know of any similar figure in the religion of other tribes. Nothing is known of her origin. She is apparently as ancient as the heaven in which she lives, and is immortal but definitely not omnipotent, nor omniscient, nor infallible. Overburdened with tasks, she may involuntarily cause damage to men through her mistakes. Nothing material in the world was created by her, nor does she govern anything; therefore she is neither the "Common Mother" nor the "Primary Mother" in Baldus' terminology.

Prayers are not directed to her, nor does she receive sacrifices. She has nothing to do directly with the culture-hero brothers, who equal her in importance, or with the spirits of the trees or the demons (ñɔɔ′) of the lower world. No shaman is in communication with her. Nevertheless, for the Tukuna she is a figure of great importance and respect, because of her inseparable connection with the notion of sin and subsequent punishment, in life or after death, since she is the mistress of that part of the human soul called "naa′ë." With the other part of the soul, called "načii′" (shade of the deceased), she has nothing to do.

ta-ë′ does not represent a divine justice that tots up the sins and good deeds of the soul. She takes into consideration only three categories of crime: incest, infanticide (including voluntary abortion), and murder through witchcraft. She does not bother with such trifles as theft or a hot-blooded killing. Incest (vɔ:′mači) is a transgression of the law of exogamy which she established when she taught the first men to which clan each belonged, making them taste the jacuruxy broth (see pp. 58 and 130); this was the only time, however, that she intervened in the work of the culture heroes. Incest is the only crime for which ta-ë′ eventually punishes the sinner, by madness while he is still living.

I have already discussed the fate of an infanticide's soul (p. 69). When the soul of a sorcerer appears before ta-ë′, she treats it in the same fashion as she does that of an infanticide; in fact, the three sins mentioned above are considered almost equal. The gravity of a crime depends upon whether the sin was committed thoughtlessly and with some extenuating circumstances, and whether it is repeated.

If there are extenuating circumstances, the sinner is purified by one of the čɔrë′ruma, which licks him from toe to crown. However, even if the naa′ë of a perverse and stubborn sinner slips past the tɔ/ri′ta gate, it is torn to shreds by the čɔrë′ruma or rejected by ta-ë′, who orders lightning to cast it down on the earth again, or even sends it below to the underworld (na:′pį), where it is transformed into a tiny frog (nu:′gu), with whose death it vanishes.

It is noteworthy that the Tukuna regard as crimes these three sins which not only harm the individual but are also ruinous for humanity as a whole. "Thou

2: Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1948
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



apart, which is correlated with their lack of social organization other than blood ties. When drunk they quarrel and often cause injuries and death. In their dealings with the Neo-Brazilians, both parties exhibit their worst qualities. Nevertheless, the *Tucuna* are not unsociable and frequently visit one another and hold festive meetings, when they work collectively for their host. They retain tenaciously their original spiritual culture, although hard work has brought important material improvements. They now have good firearms, tools, clothes, and sewing machines, and they live in financial independence. Some, however, enticed to industrial establishments (rum factories) of the civilized people, become proletarian and then degenerate.

**Moieties and clans.**—The *Tucuna* are divided into two exogamous, unnamed patrilineal moieties, associated respectively with the east and west. One has 15 unlocalized, patrilineal sibs with tree names; the other has 21 sibs with bird names. Neither the clans nor moieties have outward distinguishing features, except for the private use of certain musical instruments on ceremonial occasions. There is no clear relationship between clan members and their eponym, except that a person's name refers obscurely to certain qualities of the animal or plant, thus revealing his clan. A person is named by his maternal relatives the day after his birth.

The *Tucuna* maintain moiety exogamy with strict inflexibility, and in 1941 still punished violations with death. They regard incest as a sin against the goddess Taé, who punishes it by making one insane during his life and by annihilating his soul after his death.

## LIFE CYCLE

**Birth and childhood.**—After coitus, conception depends on Taé, who gives a soul to children. Abortion and infanticide are practiced, especially when the father is a Neo-Brazilian, as the child would be disqualified for sib and moiety membership. Otherwise, it is believed that infanticide is a sin and that Taé punishes the soul of the perpetrator after death.

Childbirth takes place in a temporary shelter prepared in the bush near the house. The newborn child is immediately painted with genipa. Both parents are confined and diet until the umbilical cord drops off. Children are carried in a woven cotton sling passing over a shoulder. Slings are double in part, so that a child sits in one portion while the other supports its back.

When a child begins to crawl, there is a feast in which it is painted with urucú and covered with bits of parrot feathers while the paint is still sticky. At another feast, formerly celebrated when the child was 2 but now when it is 4, its hair is pulled out and its ears pierced. Contrary to certain authors, this operation does not endanger a child's life. About 8 months later there is a supplementary feast when the hair, having grown again, is trimmed, and the relics of the previous feast are burned.

2: Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1948
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20



is unnecessary; a boy and girl may meet at a feast and leave married at the end. The wife's parents never renounce their authority over her and do not permit the husband to take her far away, which results in a certain matrilocal tendency.

Polygyny even today is considered licit, but cases of bigamy are rare. In the only case known, a famous man who was both priest and chief had three sisters as wives simultaneously. Other cases of sororate have occurred. The levirate, also formerly frequent, was considered desirable.

Jealousy may cause violent quarrels between husband and wife, but never murder and rarely divorce. Adultery, though causing scenes, is insufficient reason for divorce. Guilt is always placed on the woman. The father's authority in the family is great.

In case of robbery, the offended party requires restitution and sometimes is extremely severe with the thief.

Injuries and death occur almost exclusively when people are drunk during a feast, for alcohol stimulates certain *Tucuna* to fight. Drunkenness absolves the murderer from responsibility, but the victim's relatives always feel resentful and hostile toward him.

A house is the property of its builder, i.e., the head of the family. The clearing belongs to the woman by whom it was made.

The *Tucuna* no longer have chiefs as they are too individualistic to accept authority and as the civilized people have discredited the office by designating chiefs through whom they could exploit and oppress the Indians. Formerly, chiefs of local groups were heads of large families whose magic powers, intelligence, and ability in dealing with foreigners gave them prestige. There was never, however, a chief for the entire nation.

**Death.**—Until the end of the past century, the deceased and all his ornaments were placed in a large chicha jar which was covered with a vessel, buried in a cemetery, and the site sometimes marked with a rod of muirapiranga. Well-liked people sometimes were buried in the house. They put a little food, beverage, and a fire on the grave, periodically renewing it. Tessmann (1930, p. 564) incorrectly attributed secondary burial to the *Tucuna*.

## WARFARE

The *Tucuna* are not warlike. They defended themselves against the *Omagua*, their principal enemies, and drove them to the banks of the Solimões River only when the latter had invaded their lands. They fought with arrows, poisoned spears, and round tapir-hide shields, and protected their paths with poisoned caltrops. They did not take prisoners or keep trophies from slain enemy. They never fought civilized people, except to avenge personal insults.